CLERK OF SESSION

HANDBOOK

JOHN CALVIN PRESBYTERY

Revised December 2020

GUIDE TO ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF CLERK OF SESSION

The clerk of session is a vital part of the life of the church. This manual attempts to guide clerks in the work that they do. Learning the job of the clerk of session can take some time, so please feel free to ask questions as you go. The best people to help in the process are your pastor or session moderator, the previous clerk at your church or a neighboring church, or the stated clerk of the presbytery. It is crucial that the clerk have a current Book of Order of the PC(USA). A new Book comes out every two years. Contact the Stated Clerk if you need an updated copy. Other documents that guide the clerk and the session in its work are the *Book of Confessions of the PC(USA), Roberts' Rules of Order newly revised,* and the policy manuals and bylaws of the local church.

Definitions:
The Book of Order states: "Each council shall elect a clerk who shall record the transactions of the council, keep its rolls of membership and attendance, maintain any required registers, preserve its records, and furnish extracts from them when required by another council of the church. Such extracts, verified by the clerk, shall be evidence in any council of the church. The clerk of session shall be a ruling elder elected by the session for such term as it may determine." [G-3.0104]
"The clerk of session shall serve as secretary for all meetings of the congregation. If the clerk of session is unable to serve, the congregation shall elect a secretary for that meeting. The secretary shall record the actions of the congregation in minutes of the meeting." [G-1.0505]

The clerk may be a ruling elder who is no longer an active member of session. Such a person would have voice, but no vote, during meetings.

Documents:
The Book of Order designates the records that need to be kept for the session. Minutes of meetings of the session and the congregation will include actions taken by the council. The official minutes of the session need to be signed by the clerk. Minutes of a congregational meeting need to be signed by the moderator of the meeting and by the secretary, who will usually be the clerk of session.
See the Book of Order for information regarding minutes, rolls and registers. These can be found at G-3.0204 and G-3.0107. These documents are the permanent records of the church and shall be given to the presbytery if the church dissolves or is dismissed to another denomination.
The minutes and rolls/registers are reviewed by the presbytery annually. This is to ensure that documents are being kept appropriately and to allow an opportunity for each church to strengthen relationships with other churches and the higher council. The forms for these annual reviews are included in the appendix. The form for the minutes can be a guideline to help keep minutes of meetings.

Relationship to the Pastor:
The role of clerk of session necessitates a special relationship with the pastor. You are in a position to render invaluable support by:
1. Being prudent in confidential matters that may need to be considered by session.
2. Providing for docket planning for meetings and keeping up with annual requirements, unfinished business, communications, and rolls and register upkeep.
3. Being diligent to the office of clerk and following through on the duties, which include: the writing of minutes, maintenance of rolls and registers, compilation of statistical reports, and communication within the church and with other councils.
4. Aiding the pastor by being knowledgeable about the *Book of Order*, the *Book of Confessions, Roberts' Rules of Order* newly revised, the bylaws and manuals of the church and the presbytery.

Communications with the Congregation:
As the clerk of session, you are the communicating link with the session, pastor(s), and congregation. Your expertise and promptness in fulfilling the following responsibilities helps keep the congregation informed and functioning.
1. Send a reminder of session meetings.
2. Bring to the attention of the moderator, the session, or appropriate committee of the session all official communications.
3. Notify persons, committees, or special groups when they are affected by acts of the session.
4. Release promptly, after session has acted, appropriate communications and interpretations for increased communication.
5. Communicate to the congregation all matters affecting the whole congregation such as:
    - the calling and purpose of congregational meetings;
    - policies/guidelines established by the session;
    - summary of minutes of session after their approval;
    - new members received by the session.

Communications with Other Councils:
As clerk, you are your church's designated correspondent to receive and submit communications to and from other councils (other sessions, the presbytery, synod, or General Assembly). Correspondence will normally be related to:
- actions and recommendations which impact the local church;
- letters of transfer;
- benevolences;
- presbytery's annual review of session and congregational minutes;
- qualified names to nominating committees of church or presbytery;
- overtures to presbytery;

Annual Responsibilities of Session/Clerk:

January –
Annual meeting of congregation as outlined by church bylaws
Work with treasurer to fill out annual statistical report from General Assembly
With moderator, instruct, examine and ordain/install new officers

Note in minutes:
Election of clerk of session
Election of treasurer
Election of ruling elder commissioner(s) (and alternates) to Presbytery for the year
Authorization of communion schedule and list of those able to serve
Approval of special offerings for the year
Adequacy of insurance coverage for church (and manse)
Annual review of reports from all groups within the church

February – note in minutes:
Approval of annual statistical report
Copy of annual statistical report
Outcome of annual financial review
Statement on composition of the session with regards to the congregation

April-May -
Annual review of minutes and rolls/registers by the presbytery

September -
Nominating committee begins to work

October- December -
Review adequacy of terms of call with pastor and note in minutes
Include in minutes any items like housing allowance provided by congregation
Prepare annual budget
Send shared mission pledge to the presbytery
Review rolls of members baptized and active

Any time during the year -
Joint meeting of session and deacons
Personnel review with pastor(s) and other staff

Year End Reports:
There are two types of year-end reports – those for the presbytery and the annual statistical report for the General Assembly. The presbytery reports will be sent by email to the clerk and/or pastor with a date for return. Some forms need to be filled out by the pastor and some by the clerk or treasurer. These are important forms that help the presbytery know how best to guide churches, clerks and pastors in their mission and ministry. You can print the documents and return them by post or you can fill them out, save them and return them by email. It is especially crucial to have the necrology report by the established deadline so that all churches can be included in the necrology report at the February meeting of presbytery.

The annual statistical report from General Assembly is completed online. The Stated Clerk will email all clerks the username and password to be used to complete the form for your church. It is important to complete this report each year because the membership number is the way per capita is figured and it takes two years to make the change. That is, if you make the change in membership at the end of 2020, you will notice the change in per capita charged for your church beginning in January of 2022. The membership numbers also are important for the presbytery and its work with other councils. If you have difficulty, please don't hesitate to contact the Stated Clerk for assistance.

The Clerk's Role When There Is No Pastor:
When the church is without a pastor, the clerk of session becomes the primary communication person with the presbytery and the Committee on Ministry (COM). The COM will appoint a moderator to the session and it is important for the clerk of session to be in contact with the moderator regarding business that needs to be addressed. **It is no longer permitted by the Book of Order for a ruling elder on the session to moderate a session meeting**, so it becomes even more crucial to take care of all business at regularly scheduled session meetings when the moderator is present. The moderator should receive $60 plus mileage for each meeting.

The clerk of session can assist the chair of the worship committee in finding pulpit supply, if necessary. The pulpit supply list is posted on the presbytery's web site. It is necessary to click on the words “Pulpit Supply List” in order for the list to download. The Pastoral Presbyter is available to help find appropriate pulpit supply for particular Sundays.

If a PC(USA) pastor is not available to preside at the communion table, it is possible for a ruling elder(s) to be trained to officiate. In such a case, the Stated Clerk should be notified who and when such trained elders will be officiating so permission can be requested of COM. If a ruling elder from the pulpit supply list will be officiating at the Table, it is also necessary to request permission from the COM for that person to officiate. Permission must be obtained each time the ruling elder presides. Prior permission is also required for any person preaching more than two consecutive Sundays for the same congregation. In all of these cases, an email to the Stated Clerk from the clerk of session is sufficient to get the business to the COM.

The Pastor Nominating Committee may need information from the clerk of session as it prepares the documents for its work and goes about the search. Candidates often like to see statistical reports, mission statements, policies and bylaws, and financial statements.

Sample Docket for Meetings of Session

Devotion and Opening Prayer (can be led by rotation of ruling elders or by moderator)

Report of the Moderator/Pastor

Report of the Clerk (includes approval of minutes, member transfers, communications)

Report of the Treasurer (this report should be filed for review, not approved)

Reports from permanent and special committees

Report from presbytery meeting (at the session following a meeting of presbytery)

Unfinished Business

New Business

Adjournment with prayer

Called Meetings of Session

Meetings are called for particular items of business that need to be handled between scheduled meetings. A called meeting is limited to the declared purpose for which it was called. Each session sets its own time requirements for setting a called meeting.
Called meetings for receiving new members or approval of baptism do not require a full quorum of the session. These can be achieved with the presence of 2-3 members of the session.

Conducting Business by Email

With the increase in technology it is not uncommon for sessions to make simple decisions via email between meetings. There are some guidelines for conducting business in this manner.
1. Be sure that all session members can be included in communication and request that everyone "Reply All" so that the full conversation is shared by the whole session.
2. If there seems to be dissension or concern on items emailed, it would be better to call a meeting so that discussion can take place face to face.
3. The results of any decision made by email should be included in the minutes of the next regularly scheduled meeting of session.

Reminders for Session Minutes

1. Record the date, time, and place of each meeting.
2. Record the names of members of session (teaching elders and ruling elders) who are present, excused, or absent (unexcused).
3. Record the opening and closing of each meeting with prayer.
4. Record the approval and corrections of the minutes of the previous meeting. (If there are corrections, note it in the current minutes but also go back and change the previous minutes.)
5. Record only that which is vital to the transaction of the business of the meeting.
6. Record motions that are carried or defeated. Record discussion if directed by the session to do so.
7. Once the minutes are placed into the minute book, avoid erasures, interlineations, and footnotes. Mark through empty space on a page.
8. Do not insert in the records written or printed material on separate sheets of paper.
9. Record the authorization and the administration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper and Baptism. If home-bound communion is served, note the names of the authorized persons who delivered it and how many people were served.
10. Record the full name of applicants for church membership and whether they are baptized. If received by letter of transfer, list the name of the previous church. If an elder or deacon, record their names on the appropriate roll.
11. Record the full name and address of the church to which a certificate of transfer is granted along with the full name of the person transferred, including the date. On the letter of transfer sent to the receiving church, list dates of ordination if applicable, and the names of baptized children.
12. Record the name of elder(s) elected as commissioner(s) to presbytery and the period of service.
13. Include a report from the ruling elder commissioner(s) following each meeting of presbytery.
14. Record marriages of members of the church and all marriages conducted by the ministerial staff with approval of the session.
15. If the session should find it necessary to exercise discipline, contact the Stated Clerk of the presbytery for guidance. Keep minutes of all proceedings.
16. The annual General Assembly statistical report should be presented to the session and approved by them, preferably before the report if submitted.
17. Since it is only by order of the session that names are added or deleted from the rolls and register or moved from one roll to another, such changes are recorded in the session minutes as well as being made in the register.
18. Minutes of meetings of the session are signed by the clerk. Minutes of meetings of the congregation are signed by the clerk and the moderator.

Historical Preservation

The minutes and rolls/registers are historical documents of the church and should be recorded in ways that will allow them to be available for future generations. Acid-free paper should be used for keeping the final copies of minutes and for the roll book. Books that are full and no longer used can be sent to the Presbyterian Historical Foundation for safe keeping. The session can always request access to books that the Foundation has received. Many electronic media are not safe ways to store records. If a church wishes to keep digital copies of minutes and roll book, cloud storage is safest. Do not rely on flash drives or other physical storage media.

Relevant Sections of the Book of Order

Information on Categories of Membership in the church – G-1.04
Information on Meetings of the Congregation – G-1.05
Information on the Session and its meetings, rolls and registers – G-3.02

Bylaws and Manuals

The Book of Order no longer mandates some things that must now be set by the session and/or the congregation. The bylaws of the church must now set how much time must be given in a call for both session meetings and congregational meetings and how many members constitute a quorum.

Bylaws are a document of the congregation. They can be written by the session, but must be approved by the congregation.

Manuals of Operations include policies regarding the use of the building, how finances are handled, and other matters that require guidance. The manual of operations is written and adopted by the session.

SEE ALSO:
Revised Minute Review Checklist
and
Checklist for Review of Rolls and Registers